



Community Alliances for Equity
Communities of Care
COVID-19 Recovery Virtual Coffeehouse:
Intentionally Centering Parents/Caregivers in Equity Work
August 17, 2023



TRANSCRIPTION

Dr. Kyser:

Good afternoon. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us for the Region III MAP Center *Communities of Care Virtual Coffeehouse* series. Welcome, we're thrilled that you are here. The *Communities of Care Virtual Coffeehouse* series are...it's a space to virtually land. As well as work very hard to meet the needs of our students and families in the face of abrupt changes which have impacted our routines and response to COVID-19. As we work to pursue our consistent stance on realizing educational equity, we want to use this as an opportunity to share what is going well, in addition to our struggles.

Dr. Kyser:

To be clear, the Region III Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center *Communities of Care Virtual Coffeehouses* are intended to center the perspectives of each of you as participants. We encourage all of us to come together in this virtual space, share our experiences, and use dialogue and conversation just as you would in your local coffeehouse. So again, welcome. This *Communities of Care Virtual Coffeehouse* is focused on intentionally centering parents and caregivers in equity work. This virtual convening is aimed to acknowledge the need for us to come together in virtual community to discuss challenges, discover and be encouraged by what we've learned collectively, as well as to work to meet the demands of teaching and learning as community members post COVID-19. This is an opportunity for us to learn and dialogue together.



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Dr. Kyser:

Please note that our conversation today will emphasize and center those who have been historically and contemporarily marginalized, underserved, and disenfranchised, as is our charge in supporting public pre-K through 12 LEAs, SEAs, and other responsible governmental agencies to redress students' civil rights violations in the areas of race, sex, national origin, and religion. Please be ready to take notes as we engage today.

Dr. Kyser:

So for those that may be unfamiliar with who we are as an Equity Assistance Center, or the Region III Equity Assistance Center, we are the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, or MAP Center for short. We are one of four regional Equity Assistance Centers funded by the United States of Education, Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The MAP Center provides technical assistance and training upon request, again, for systems change and transformation, in the areas of race, sex, national origin, and religion, and how that impacts socio-economic integration, as well as supporting students receiving special education services. AQ, who's going to introduce herself here shortly, is putting a link in the chat for you, if you're interested to learn more about the MAP Center.

Dr. Kyser:

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in public schools, parents and caregivers of those students, community organizations, and other community members. We ask that this resource is cited if research, ideas, or information from this document are used in any produced works. No part of this document may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means for commerce media or commercial purposes without permission in writing from the Great Lakes Equity Center.

Dr. Kyser:

So again, welcome. My name is Tiffany Kyser. I have the great privilege of serving as the Associate Director for the MAP Center and I will be serving as your lead facilitator, and I'm joined by AQ who will be serving as the technical director. AQ, I'll give you an opportunity to introduce yourself.

Alicia Quash-Scott:

Hello everyone, it's nice to see you all today. I am a new doctoral research assistant here in the MAP Center, here in Indiana. So, it's nice to see you all. Thank you, Tiffany.

Dr. Kyser:

Thank you. Thank you, AQ, no problem. And if you have any tech issues, feel free to private chat AQ, and she'll be more than happy to help troubleshoot with you. Lastly, we want to apologize in advance for the, the mid-switch of the Zoom link. Technology was not welcoming us on the scheduled Zoom link, so I appreciate your flexibility and patience as we switched Zoom Rooms. Also, just want to share with you all that we are recording.



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Dr. Kyser:

We...one of our goals at the MAP Center is to engage participants in well-defined, content rich technical assistance such that knowledge and expertise are shared in a way that results in transformative systemic change as well as personal reflection and growth. To this end, we aim to make this unique learning available on our website via recording and transcription. Additionally, sharing photos of today's conversations on our social media platforms. We encourage participants to consider this disclaimer as they engage with us today.

Dr. Kyser:

And then finally the *Virtual Coffeehouse* is intended to be interactive. Participants are asked to interact in real-time via this format. You would just unmute your mic and or your camera to participate once we engage in our conversation. We do ask, to reduce noise, that you mute your mic when not speaking just so that we can honor everyone in the virtual space. Furthermore, close captioning has been enabled. So, if you prefer close captioning in this space, you may elect to do that now. I'll turn it over to AQ who's going to share a little bit about our photo OP at the end of the *Virtual Coffeehouse*.

Alicia Quash-Scott:

Yes, so, just to let you all know we will be taking a group picture, which will go on social media and as well...our website as well. And then if you don't want to be included in the photo, again, just mute your video at the time of the photo and we'll let you know before we take it.



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Dr. Kyser:

Thank you, AQ. Onto our conversation starters as we get the conversation started. We're thrilled to have a group of conversation starters that represent both rural, suburban, and urban context. We're excited to hear about their perspectives and insights, and they will serve to break the quote unquote virtual ice as we pepper in three reflective prompts in today's *Virtual Coffeehouse* session. Our lead conversation starter and MAP Center Equity Fellow for Oklahoma, Dr. Daniel Hamlin, or Dr. Dan Hamlin, will lead this conversation by first grounding us with innovative strategies for engaging families in urban, suburban, and rural school communities. A little bit about Dr. Hamlin before I turn it over to him.

Dr. Kyser:

Dr. Hamlin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma. In his research, Dr. Hamlin focuses on the effects of education policies related to student health and safety, parental/caregiver involvement, and school climate, and school choice. Dr. Hamlin's work appears in peer-reviewed journals, including American Educational Research Journal, Sociology of Education, the Journal of Criminal Justice, Education Policy, and Urban Education. The list goes on, but I'll stop there.

Dr. Kyser:

His research has also received coverage in the Wall Street Journal, NPR, Forbes, Marginal Revolution, The 74, and Chalk Beat. Dr. Hamlin is the recipient of research grants from the National Science Foundation, the Ontario Ministry of Education, and the Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems

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Organization. At Oklahoma University, Dr. Hamlin received the College of Education's Research and Scholarship Award last year in 2022, and the Pre-tenure Faculty Award in 2021. Prior to joining Oklahoma University, Dr. Hamlin received the Derek Bach Award For Excellence in Teaching as a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University.

Dr. Kyser:

Dr. Hamlin earned his PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy from the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education at the University of Toronto, where he received the Ken Leithwood Outstanding Thesis of the Year award for his dissertation. So, without further ado, I'm going to turn the proverbial mic over to Dr. Daniel Hamlin. And again, welcome to each of our conversation starters and of course Dr. Hamlin will provide an opportunity for you all to say hello to the virtual group. Dan.

Dr. Hamlin:

Okay, great. Thank you, Tiffany. Thank you for that, that introduction. That was a lot about me there. So, I'm gonna, I'm gonna keep my time brief here because we have an expert panel from three great districts here in Oklahoma. So, Carla Atkinson is joining us from Norman and she's our, kind of our suburban representative today. And then we have Kulsum Siddiqui, Mindi Bisdee, and Sara Fitch. They're joining us from Union Public Schools, which is an urban district in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And then we have Jeremy Jackson who's joining us from Warner, which is a, a, a district-run public school in, or district in a rural part of Oklahoma. And they're going to tell you a little bit more about their school communities and



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parent/family engagement strategies as we get into the session here.

Dr. Hamlin:

So why don't I go ahead and start out by giving us just a little bit just kind of layer our conversation, give us a brief overview of existing research on family engagement. Talk a little bit about some of the challenges and opportunities for schools to engage families, and then we'll, we'll quickly turn to the panel.

Dr. Hamlin:

So, if you go into Google Scholar, and you type the term parental involvement into it, you're gonna get back millions of hits, and I checked last night, it's about 3.6 million studies and scholarly articles that will pop up if you type parental involvement. So, you have decades of research on family involvement in schools. But, you know, what is...what does that actually mean? The term is kind of amorphous. Family engagement can refer to really numerous activities and behaviors that families will undertake with their children when it comes to their school life.

Dr. Hamlin:

So, if you were to kind of step back from this massive research literature to try to take stock of it, I think one way to simplify things is to divide family engagement into two broad buckets: school-based family engagement and home-based family engagement. And generally speaking, if you look at this research, it tends to find positive associations between different forms of school-based and home-based family engagement, and student, school, and even community outcomes. But there is some caution warranted here.

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Dr. Hamlin:

Most of this literature is based on correlational studies. Although not all of it, but most of it is correlational. And so, you have what researchers will try to do is they'll try to take into account other factors that might affect both parental involvement and various types of student outcomes. So, they'll try to take into account socioeconomic status, ethnic background, parental education level, and many, many other factors to try to understand what is the actual unique effect of parental involvement on an outcome of interest?

Dr. Hamlin:

But it's important to note that much of the research is not causal. It's...much of the research is also based on surveys where researchers will ask parents and teachers and principals to report on whether some type of parental involvement or family engagement activity is happening and, and to also report on how frequently that activity is happening. So that can also introduce some, some bias as well. So, when we're considering this research, it's important to, to be mindful of the different limitations that are in this literature. And that's not to say we can't take anything away from it, it's just we have to be mindful of the, of the limitations.

Dr. Hamlin:

When you look at home-based forms of parental involvement, so learning at home, parental homework help, different types of parenting styles related to academic socialization of the child, you're gonna find strong positive associations with home-based forms of parental involvement and individual outcomes like student achievement, socio-emotional development, and even student behavior in school. And in particular, when you look at their, at the

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literature, there actually is some experiment. There are some experimental studies, some causal studies. And that relates to, or in, these are particularly studies related to parent-child shared reading programs during early elementary school. So, these types of studies. often school led programs, they're associated with strong positive outcomes for, for young children. And these studies generate credibly causal results because they're random...tend to be randomized control trials in many cases.

Dr. Hamlin:

When you look at school-based forms of parental involvement, it's a little bit more difficult to kind of pin down the, the true effects of school-based facets of parental involvement on various types of outcomes, but it does appear to be the case that parent participation at school, so parent volunteering, parent decision making, these types of school-based participation activities, that they're linked to school-level factors. And in some cases, community-level factors. So, you can think about connections between, or links between school safety and school-based parental involvement, or even school climate in school-based parental involvement.

Dr. Hamlin:

So, you know, just kind of, you know, move when we, you know, take, you know, we have this, this kind of, this literature base that we're drawing from, and of course the federal government, states, and many local districts have, are actively promoting parent engagement. But there's a fair amount of research that says that parents may face different constraints when it comes to being involved in schools. And these can be kind of complex. Can relate to

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complex work schedules, time, information, language, social networks. I mean, there's various factors that may limit how and when and why a parent may be able to come, and become involved.

Dr. Hamlin:

And in some cases, these can map onto socioeconomic status, geographic location, or even the ethnic and cultural background of families. And researchers have tried to understand, okay, what can schools do to try to alleviate some of these barriers? And there's some evidence that building trust with families, relationship building approaches, schools that are responsive to specific needs of families, that these schools can involve a wider range of families. But, you know, what does this actually look like? How does it differ across school context? You know, these I think are some of the issues. There's some, there's definitely some questions there that I think the answers, too, can vary across different school sites. And these are some of the issues we're going to jump into today with our expert panel.

Dr. Hamlin:

So, let me go ahead and turn now to the panel. And I want to just take a step back with our panelists here for a minute. So, maybe you could tell us a little bit about your, your district. And then, you know, what, what, what is the driving purpose for your district behind family engagement? Why family engagement in your district? Is it just, is it academic outcomes? Is it school climate, or is it something else altogether? I mean what, how is, how are, how are you and your district thinking about family engagement? So maybe you, the folks at Union, Kulsum, could you, could you all get us started?

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Kulsum Siddiqui:

Yes. Hi, I am Kulsum Siddiqui. I am the District Community School Liaison at Union Public Schools. And just to give you a little bit of background about our school district, we are, we've got about 15,000 students, pre-K through twelfth grade. We serve about, most of our students are from Tulsa with a portion from a, a ,a suburb called Broken Arrow. Our student population is very diverse. We're about 39% Hispanic, 25% Caucasian, 15% African American. And our students speak over 64 languages. And close to 30% of our students are classified as English Learners, and about 72% of our students qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. And for us family engagement strategies really stem from, sort of our history.

Kulsum Siddiqui:

And so, Union Public Schools actually once served high rates of middle class and affluent students. And about the early 2000's we started seeing a shift in the demographics and we started seeing an increase of students who really needed more support than a traditional school could provide. And so, we sort of adopted this model called the Community Schools Model, which essentially means what can we do as a school district to remove barriers for students, and how do we bring in outside partners to help, to help? And, and, and one important pillar of that is family and community engagement. And we always take a two-generational approach to, to school. Is, a student cannot do well in school if parents are struggling. So, the idea of parent engagement is just ingrained in every bit of the work that we do. And our mission is a hundred percent college... 100% graduation, college and career ready. And



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we know we can't achieve that without the support of families and parents.

Kulsum Siddiqui:

And, and I know both Mindi and Sara who work at our schools are, are, incredible in the work that they do and how they engage our families. So, I'll kind of let them speak a little bit more specifically about how they engage our families, but for us, you need, it's really important for us to take a two-generational approach, and including families every step of the way. And, and it really starts by removing barriers because we feel like that helps prevent disengagement, if that makes sense. So, Mindi or Sara, do y'all wanna talk a little bit about some of the strategies you use?

Sara Fitch:

I'll go. So, at our school, we really have seen a lot of results in the last 2 years post-COVID. Not that it's been completely post-COVID, but on the other side of COVID, with, with meeting our parents' needs and finding out what they want. We really saw with our families at our school, a need for them to create community with other families in our school. So, my elementary school is a little bit different than the averages that the whole district has as far as student population. We have about 65% Hispanic students, about 50% of them are English Language Learners. And our, our free and reduced lunch rate is about 95%.

Sara Fitch:

So, we have a fairly high poverty area. But we have, we're so rich in culture. We're so rich in community. And so we have really grabbed onto that and started to try to meet our families where they're at and,

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and to focus on the needs that they have. And like Kulsum said, we do a lot to bring in community partners to take down those barriers that would prevent them from learning. But we also really try to create the culture of community within our school, with our families, with our staff.

Sara Fitch:

We're constantly talking about family and how our school belongs to our families. It's not our school, it's their school, and we're really introducing to them the idea of giving them ownership. And I think that's really impactful because so many of them are new to our country. A lot of them are first-generation immigrants, and so for them to take ownership in something is incredible. At Union, we really strive to make our buildings and our classrooms and our facilities as nice as they can, because we know that a lot of times it's the nicest thing our students and families have. And there's so much pride in our community because of that. So, we, we just really strive to create that culture. And it's either through gathering at our school, gathering at, in their neighborhood, gathering at their apartment complex. Sometimes we...as, as community schools, sometimes we set up a date to meet at a park. So we really want to offer a lot of different opportunities for them to connect and build relationships with our staff, and build relationships with each other.

Dr. Hamlin:

Yeah, I'll just jump in and concur with that. You all have some wonderful facilities. I took a tour of Ochoa not too long ago and was really impressed with it. Incredible school building. How about Jeremy? Maybe we could turn to Warner.



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Jeremy Jackson:

Absolutely. We, we live, or right on I-40, so we have a major interstate that goes right, you know, through our community. We have no stop lights; we are decidedly rural. Similar to what they were saying, we're about 70% free and reduced lunch, and 54 to 55% minority. The primary, primary of that being 49 to 50%, I think, Native American. So, the one thing we really focus on is academic outcomes for families and breaking up poverty cycles. What we've seen our families do is really kind of buy-in because they see their kids at Hope. Two years ago we graduated a group of, you know, 50 students and 10 of those had an ACT score of 28 or higher, and basically had their college paid for. And so, those, those families in engaging those families, bringing them in and partnering with them, and giving them hope has been one of the biggest things that we've done.

Jeremy Jackson:

You know, Daniel, talked a lot taking care of needs. That's the other thing that really buys you with those [inaudible]. What do they need to be successful and, and, and we do several different events just ensuring those students, those parents are taken care of. We're just like everybody else in Union. We have parents that say you can't learn math because I don't know math. We're breaking that stereotype, breaking that down and helping those students believe that they can do more, so they are. Yes, Sara and Kulsum talked about being college and career already. We want our kids to believe they could be gainfully employed when they walk out of Warner Public Schools the very first day. Whether they want to go, you know, get a job or they want go to trade school, they want to go to



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college. But, but we're investing in those, those students and those families. Through that partnership, we continue to see very good results.

Dr. Hamlin:

Excellent. And Carla's here as well from, Norm- Norman Public Schools, which is a suburban district. It's where the University of Oklahoma's located. Carla, could you share with us a little bit about your district? Oh, I'll just unmute you.

Carla Atkinson:

Sorry about that. Can you hear me now?

Dr. Hamlin:

Yep, good.

Carla Atkinson:

Norman, Norman has about 14,300-ish students right now. And this, this is the first time we've had a Family Engagement Coordinator position. So, we're really, really focused on learning everything that we can about increasing family engagement and community schools, and supporting our ever-changing population in Norman. We have quite a, quite a high number of free and reduced percentage kids in our district. More than people would think about when they think about Norman being a university town and everything, but we have a lot of students and families and needs, and that seems to have just increased exponentially after the pandemic. Like someone said earlier, not post-pandemic, but following the pandemic, that's increased. So, I'm just really happy to be able to listen in today and get some ideas from other people and other districts, and I'm actually



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wanting to visit Union to take a look around and, and meet you folks in person. So, thanks for inviting me today.

Dr. Hamlin:

Excellent. And you know, maybe as we dig into this first question here, we'll open it up not just to the panel, but anyone else in the audience who wants to jump in as well. So, you know, how, so I've heard a little bit about the, sort of the overarching philosophy of family engagement in your respective districts. But, you know, oftentimes when I'm in conversation with leaders about these issues, they'll say, "Well, you know, the, the, the parents who are active and always involved, well, they're easy to, to bring to school. They're easy to engage in different programs, but you know there's a lot of parents who, you know, I want, who I would like them to be more involved, but I don't know how to get them involved." And so, you know, how can we kind of move beyond maybe some of the conventional strategies to involve a wider range of parents? I mean, what do parents need? What do, what do we may be missing out there that would enable more parents to be involved, whether at home or at school or in some other way?

Kulsum Siddiqui:

Yeah, one thing I would like to mention is our assumption is 100% of our families at Union want to be engaged and they want to be involved. We operate under that assumption. And what that looks like for each parent is very different. And, and I, think Mindi and Sara can also speak to this, but it's really a hundred percent all about communication. Is...we often tend to assume a parent's gonna read an email or they're gonna read a flyer, but I think the, as much as we

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can communicate with our families in many, many different ways, it's really such a great way to get them involved. And again, that involvement can be defined in so many different ways, right?

Kulsum Siddiqui:

Family engagement isn't just about how many, how many people are attending your back-to-school night. It's also about our parents reading at home with their kids. Are they, are they participating in parent-teacher conferences? And so do...for us, what has worked really well, and I know that Mindi and Sara can speak to this, is just communicating, communicating, communicating, and meeting the needs...that, those communication needs, and using different tools. And we're very lucky at Union Public Schools to have lots of different options to be able to communicate with our families, and in many different languages as well.

Dr. Hamlin:

What, what are those tools, exac--? I mean, is it, are we talking about several emails, a phone call, a home visit? What does that look... all of the above? What does that look like?

Kulsum Siddiqui:

All of the above. And Sara and Mindi, I will let you all speak to the, exactly how, what tools you use with your families.

Mindi Bisdee:

Hi, one thing that we adopted just recently and some of your other districts may use this as well is a, an app called Talking Points. Talking Points is something that we can use to speak to every one of our parents. It syncs to our student data system. And so, and that also does connect to the language that our parents



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...speak. And so, when we send the message out, it will translate that message out into the language, their home language. And that has been invaluable because we cannot assume that, you know, every parent is going to be able to speak English, or that they're gonna have someone in their home that can translate to that...that for them. So, we wanna make sure that we can communicate with them in that language. And that has really made a huge difference in us being able to get back, get that two-way communication going, 'cause I think that's, that's very valuable.

Mindi Bisdee:

Something else that, you know, Kulsum did say is home visits. I know at our school we visit every one of our family's homes at the beginning of our school year. We go across our neighborhood and we visit all of their homes and welcome them back to school because we want them to know they're valued, and that we're willing to give our time to go see them and then we want to see them in our buildings as well. So, I think having that parent voice as well and just, you know, really making them know that what they, what the...the opinions that they have, and what they have to say, is important to us, and then we implement those ideas. So not just hearing them, but also putting that out there; making sure that we're implementing what they're, what they're telling us.

Kulsum Siddiqui:

And one thing I would--

Dr. Hamlin:

So that's...yeah, sorry, go ahead.

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Kulsum Siddiqui:

Oh, I...one thing I would like to add is, because we have a team of Community School Coordinators, and that is that one person at, at each of our Title I schools, that is that liaison between the school and the parent, having that role has been incredibly important in making sure our parents are involved and we've established that trust, right? Our families trust us. And so very often when there's a crisis, that Community School Coordinator is that first phone call they usually make, and that, and that comes with time. It's not something that happened overnight. We've been doing this community schools work for about 20 years now. And it's certainly not perfect, but having that person, having a designated person in the school building that parents can call, honestly, 24 hours a day, has been incredibly important in, in making sure our parents feel, feel like they have a voice, and that you know, oftentimes school building principals are busy. We know that. And that's why our role is so important in terms of engaging with our families.

Dr. Hamlin:

You know, that, that's impressive that you're able to do a home visit at the start of school year with every single one of your families. And I, I know some leaders who are, will be watching this will say, "Well, that sounds like a pretty big undertaking. How do you pull it off?" Or is it maybe not as big of an undertaking as it seems?

Mindi Bisdee:

Well, I will say that, we do have an advantage that we are a neighborhood school, and so every student that lives in, or that attends our school, for the most part, I would say about you know, 90% live within our, our square mile. So that's a much easier. So

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obviously, you know, if you are a school that is serving, like maybe a middle school that's serving all the across their district that would be much more difficult. But it's been something that we've done for at least, I think, 10 to 12 years, and so we've kind of really gotten the, got it into a really good routine and we split our teachers up and do groups of 2 or 3, and we spend an evening and just do the visits. So, but it, it is nice, it's something our families expect. They welcome us, sometimes we eat a meal with them, they have things prepared. And so it's been, it's really something that's become a tradition and that our families really enjoy so, and our teachers as well.

Dr. Hamlin:

Excellent. Jeremy, you want to jump in?

Jeremy Jackson:

I'd love to share. So, our, our scenario is a little bit different. We do, I believe in the positive. My background is human resource. I was HR Director before I alternatively certified. So we try to deliver a positive message before we ever have to deliver anything negative. So, the second or third week in school, we use Google Sheets and we contact, you know, three to five students, and have to share a positive personal message to that parent. Can't be a voicemail, can't be an email, we actually have to build that relationship because we know at some point, we're going to have to deliver some type of negative. And so, what we've seen from that is that when we have parent-teacher conferences, because we've delivered the positive those parents want to come. They want to hear the positive things that we, that we have to say, or my teachers have to say about their kids.

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Jeremy Jackson: So, we've really seen an uptick in our involvement in parent-teacher conferences. Similarly, once we do have to have those difficult conversations, because we've built that, that trust that we're gonna share not only the negative, we're going to share the positive and we're going to celebrate that, through our social media, through our newsletter, on our web page, on our school website. So, we kind of get that trust and that buy-in from those parents and those families.

Jeremy Jackson: Similar to what they're talking about there at Union, we set aside a Friday a month where the principals and I, we do home visits. If we can't get them to answer the phone, we're gonna go see them and check on them, and make sure they have the basic needs. We operate a clothes closet here on campus and, and we have some food as well. And so, if there's something there that they need, we can have that with us when we go to take care of the basic needs before we can even worry about educational needs. And, and again we're not a big district, you know, as far as circumference goes across, but, but we do try to reach out and make those positive contacts and meet those needs of our families.

Dr. Hamlin: That's excellent. And, Carla, did you want to jump in?

Carla Atkinson: I would say right now we're really working on focusing on that two-way communication and family engagement. You know, letting and rather...trying to move from just parents coming in and getting information that we choose to give them, like when they come to parent-teacher conferences, but really focusing on seeking out ways

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to give them input, and what goes into those conferences. And then of course when we get the input listening to it, and following through with it, it's been, it's been a major focus.

Dr. Hamlin:

So, a lot of schools now are doing school climate surveys where they'll ask families and parents and caregivers for the, I think the input, the types of input that I, that I think you're talking about, Carla. You know, for the group, is, are those, are those surveys valuable for getting inputs or for other leaders watching this? Is that a way to try to, try to start to get input from families about what their specific needs are? Or is there some other way to go about this? Is it more personal and one-on-one?

Carla Atkinson:

I would say that I think it's important. It's a, it's a starting place. Oftentimes though, if it's a QR code, or something that's in a Thursday folder it may get set aside until a more convenient time to do it. I think having a varied approach to how you attain the information from the survey. Also, not everybody, you know, if you've tried to take a survey on your cell phone with a QR code, it's not the easiest thing in the world to do. And going back to what someone said earlier about that face-to-face contact being so important. I'm looking at inviting, you know, of course we'll push it out with a QR code and digitally and all those things, but then making some direct contact with parents to come in and fill the survey out and that's a chance to get, establish that face-to-face relationship with them. And they may not have internet at home, or they may not, you know, be able to read completely what we need them to read. So, trying to

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just, assist them in that way and making sure that, that underrepresented population gets, gets a fair say in their input as well.

Dr. Hamlin:

Excellent. Is that, anybody who's not on the panel here wanna, wanna chime in a little bit? Like to give a chance to some of the audience to jump in as well. Tiffany?

Dr. Kyser:

Yeah, I will. I know that there's some questions in the chat, just to signal folks that might be, not as, not as sort of pivoting back and forth. And it looks like that Circe has a question: "I'm really interested in the original question of why. Why is parent engagement important? For example, I'm curious what folks might think about parents and family members who trust schools to do our jobs and do not feel the need to be engaged. Is that necessarily bad? These days it's pressure, I feel really good when families trust educators." And Circe, I'll try to respond to that, and I want to summarize for time some highlights that I've been capturing as we move into our final two questions that we may want to bundle together for time. And Circe, if I miss anything, please do let me know.

Dr. Kyser:

I, I believe that Kulsum had mentioned this term trust, involvement, and what I noted as asset assumptions about parents and caregivers. And I think it's deeply important, and from what I heard from, from Jeremy, from Mindi, from Sara, from Kulsum, from, your names says Cat...Catkinson in the chat. But I think it's Carla, Carla.



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Carla Atkinson:

Yes.

Dr. Kyser:

What I heard from Carla is all about this, we may move beyond conventional parent/caregiver engagement, which yes includes data, which yes includes home visits, which yes includes parent-teacher conferences and phone calls to parents. But what I heard from the panel that I found really interesting is this idea of trust, and acknowledging that in each of our respective school communities, the ways in which our school systems, i.e., us as educators, have not been effective of developing trust, of acknowledging parent and caregiver voice. This was something that Ruthie placed in the chat, that Robin placed in the chat as well, in terms of redefining what we mean by engagement.

Dr. Kyser:

And I think this idea Kulsum lifted up and, and others of, of having asset assumptions, developing trust. Jeremy mentioned this idea of authentic partnerships, that not only are we working to equip students to be successful in terms of the workforce, but equipping them to engage in authentic partnerships and vice versa. Educators are engaging in authentic partnerships. Sara talked a lot about the newness, right, that when you're dealing with immigrant or refugee populations, or populations across your school community, people are experiencing difference. And understanding and having a space that's well-resourced for everyone to access is really, really important.

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Dr. Kyser:

Decentering the brick and mortar. So Sara talked about, Kulsum talked about, Mindi talked about this idea of reframing engagement, not solely within the walls of a school building, but within the authentic community in which students and family, and parents and caregivers reside. Carla talked about listening. When parents and community members tell you what they need, listen to them. And believe them. I thought was really, powerful. And Mindi talked a lot about being responsive. She mentioned the app to translate in home language, but underneath that was how are we building bridges of communication that are being responsive to parents and caregivers, and not dismissive and not erasing both the home languages and heritage practices.

Dr. Kyser:

So, those are just some highlights from the panel that I wanted to lift up. And I also want to share, I think it connects a lot with Dan's work and with the work of Dr. Beth Harry, this idea of cultural reciprocity, that schools inherently have power in terms of communication and the structures in which we've traditionally engaged with parents and caregivers. And I think the panel has elucidated really practical ways and approaches, and I would offer dispositions. Sort of postures of thinking about engagement differently and utilizing really, I think, traditional mechanisms of data, home visits, technology in ways that really center parents and caregivers as authentic, meaningful partners in the, in the work of teaching and learning. So, Dan, I'll turn it back over to you.

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Dr. Hamlin:

That was an impressive summary. That's quite comprehensive. So, you know, there was a little bit of a side issue that I think came up as I was listening, and I want to see what the panel and others think. You know, you talked a lot about the climate, community schools. It sounds like these, all the districts are extraordinarily welcoming when it comes to families. But you know, I'm also, as I increasingly will visit districts, you'll walk up and it almost feels like you're going to, entering an airport, right. There'll be different types of barriers increasingly, you'll have to go through a pretty rigorous security process in a lot of schools.

Dr. Hamlin:

And that seems to be a trend that's on the rise. That has to do, you know, more with maybe a district's philosophy around school safety. But I was...I'm wondering, you know, how do you, you know, how do you think about ensuring that the school is an open neighborhood school that's kind of open to the community? And then how do you kind of, you know, make sense of that given the rise in lots of different school security? How do you, I guess the question here is, how do you ensure that the school is still a welcoming environment despite this kind of trend towards more security in schools that may, may make people feel like, "Well, I should kind of maybe stay away from school? It's not a place for me."

Kulsum Siddiqui:

So as a, as a community s--, as a district that believes and has adopted the philosophy of community schools, in any given moment we have dozens and dozens of community partners across all of our school buildings. We, I mean, yes, you have to have, you know, you

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have to present your ID, you do have to go through sort of a background check and that's really for the safety of our students and our families, and our community partners. But you know, and, and there's just a need for that and our families understand why, but I mean, gosh, when I was at Clark Elementary, in, you know, Clark Elementary, was the first official community school at Union and it started off with a school-based health clinic in partnership with OU.

Kulsum Siddiqui:

So you had patients coming in and out of the school building all day long. And I mean, yes, they had to provide, you know, an ID, but that, that, that has never limited our ability to welcome families and partners, and faith-based, I mean, we just have at any given moment, we have site based therapists that are in our schools. We have volunteers, we have parents and those extra security measures have, have never, have never been a turn-off for any of our partners. And our families understand why.

Kulsum Siddiqui:

In fact, several years ago when I was a coordinator at Clark Elementary, we did a Hispanic Parent Night. And one of the questions that was asked for our families was, and you know, there were, there were a lot of safety concerns with school shootings that were sort of, you know, that were happening. And our parents actually wanted more. They said, can we get a metal detector? Can we get police officers? And that's not going to happen at Union Public Schools, but we did show them you know, we kind of took them a tour, gave them a tour saying, "Hey look, here's, you know, we have, every exit is locked. And, you know, we have all these

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cameras in place.” And, for families, that felt...they just felt great with that. And they understand, and our community partners understand that. So anytime we enter an agreement with the partner, they know that they have to, you know, provide a license when they come in. And, in...any of those safety measures have not at all impacted our, have not impacted how welcome people feel when they walk inside our buildings. And having a nice friendly receptionist is the key to preventing disengagement.

Dr. Hamlin:

Excellent. Others?

Jeremy Jackson:

I'll be happy to share. As a small school, we not only host events; we'll will host funerals, almost a little bit everything, you know, here on the school site. So, we do have to communicate, make it, making the community very aware of why we have our safety measures. We do have that our every locked gate, all the lock doors. So, I think they feel very good about that. On evenings when we can, we do open it up for everyone. So, we do events [inaudible] Christmas, it's totally free to the community, free food, anytime you got free food in rural Oklahoma, everyone's gonna show up.

Jeremy Jackson:

And so we'll, we'll bring, you know, 850 kids, we'll have 16 to 1,700 people come through the buildings. They can see it, they can touch it, they can see what we're doing take care of their children. But it is: it's part of letting you see there's a purpose, it's driven to keep their kids safe, keep them educated while they're here, but you know they're also welcome to use it. So our community it's just...Kulsum

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said our community partners are able to use it, youth leagues, sports organizations, different things like that. We're still a host because we have the largest, you know, facility in the area for, for those, events. So that's how you, you know, it's the communication piece for us with our community.

Dr. Hamlin:

Yeah. And so, I do want to circle back to this question that was in the chat. Is it, is it Cirque or Circe, I'm not sure how to pronounce it. I apologize if I've butchered that. But she says you know, "Why, why is, why is parent engagement impor—important? We have families who say they trust school so, you know, why not when you're at school trust the professionals? They're, they're the ones who are educating the children. Why, you know, why family engagement?" I think is the question here.

Mindi Bisdee:

I added a response to her question in the, in the chat, but I'll just repeat it. Is that I feel like one of, just one benefit of parent engagement, and I think it's part of why it's important, is just instilling the value of education in our kids. Is that they need to know that education is important. It's a pathway to their future. And if parents are involved, whether it's through volunteering or whether it's, you know, being involved in that, in that home-based way, then they're showing their kids that if it's, if I'm willing to give my time and effort to school and to being there and to showing up, then it's important. Because all of us have very little time and our kids see that. They know that we are busy. And so, if we're willing to give that time and effort, then school must be important, and education is important. So,

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I just think that's something that my parents have really, have said to us, to me, on numerous occasions, and I think that's really something that I have really held on to and I appreciate the fact that they are, they're seeing that, and they really want to instill that in their kids.

Dr. Hamlin:

That's kind of what the activity is, is signaling. Is that what you're saying? It's what you're signaling to the child through your actions. Is that...

Mindi Bisdee:

Exactly, exactly. It's like that action at being involved. I mean, it's just like if, you know, if you're involved in your church, it's the same thing. It's like if you get take your kids to church every Sunday and if you're involved, you're telling your kids that this is important, this matters to me. The same thing as in school. If I'm putting my effort and my time, and my action into, into school, and really showing you and supporting you in that, then you're, you're instilling that value into your kids.

Kulsum Siddiqui:

And I, and the kids love seeing their parents in the school building. You know, it's just the smiles when they get to see their mom or their dad in school building is just...I know, just on a personal level for my own children. You know, I don't miss a single event. And it's, it's incredibly important for my children to have, you know to see their mom, and yeah not necessarily their dad, but definitely to see their mom in this, in the school building is incredibly important. So family engagement isn't just for the improvement of the school, but also for, but also for the, for the students.



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Carla Atkinson:

I agree, and...

Dr. Kyser:

I think, I think... Go ahead, Carla. I'm sorry.

Carla Atkinson:

I think, you know, we're not, we're not encour--, we are not asking parents to be teachers or to manage classrooms. We are simply asking them to be engaged in their child's school and then there's, in their education. Not do the work of the teachers but to engage with them to support their students, which in turn builds a stronger community.

Dr. Hamlin:

Yeah, Ruthie, you have your hand up.

Dr. Payno-Simmons:

Yeah, thank you. I just appreciate all the really amazing ideas and, and strategies that are going forth. And one thing that it was prompted as I was listening was this idea of parents knowing their children. They know who their children are. They understand a lot of things about them. So, part of that engagement is us as, you know, school officials, learning from our parents about, our students, their children. And, and incorporating what we're learning in the process. It helps us to be more responsive to understanding why students may respond the way they do, think the way they do. And so, I think that's a really important one.

Dr. Payno-Simmons:

I think that it changes the conversation when we're at a table engaging and planning, or discussions around structures of the schools to have parents participate in that. They're going to provide,

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you know, just insight that we wouldn't necessarily think of in the same way. And so there, there is this part of engagement that also helps to inform the structures of schooling, which then helps it to be more responsive both to the students and the parents. So that, that's one of the things that I think about when I think about parent engagement. And I think that it leads to more positive outcomes because the then students begin to see themselves more, you know, adequately reflected in the different aspects of school in the community that they're in.

Dr. Hamlin:

Yeah, thank you, Ruthie. And I, I thank Tiffany for putting up our next question. I think she's signaling me to move along, make sure we get to all of our questions here. So, and this is a good one. How is maybe thinking or the way that you respond to families, how has it changed coming off the pandemic?

Dr. Kyser:

I think for, for me, Dan, just to I'll summarize a little bit for the prior question and try to get it to make some connections to the question is, I think that Cirque, is it Circe or Cirque? Circe. Circe, I apologize that I pronounced that wrong earlier. For me, I think the importance along with the shares is that public schooling is a public communal endeavor, and teaching/learning is a part of that endeavor. And by parents and caregivers being engaged in school communities authentically, valuing authentic parent and caregiver communication, it sets...we talked a lot about in the last question, of modeling, of being a representation. Mindi did a great job of sharing kind of her own personal story about her family of origin. And I think as adults,



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we have a responsibility of modeling how we engender collaboration and engagement across difference.

Dr. Kyser:

And though some parents and caregivers may have a particular value set or tradition, where, as Dan said, schooling is for the experts in schooling, I don't need to be involved, we also are in a public enterprise of schooling, and so different parents and caregivers have different value sets. And so not only having, as Kulsum mentioned, a mother or caregiver show up, or father and caregiver show up, but also that there are families that are intergenerational. That there are aunts and uncles, that there are grandparents, that there might be two fathers or two mothers. There might be a single parent who, who selected that. We might have family who comes from a tradition of adoption. Where the traditional structures of a nuclear family are different. We may have veterans where certain...the mother may be deployed overseas. And so, there are different configurations and different considerations.

Dr. Kyser:

How that connects to the, the COVID-19 era is, I think through understanding the variety and the difference. And, and I think that Mindi brought this up with the app again. I'll mention of technology Robin placed chat, "Is there a possibility to have virtual home tours?" Is there a possibility of using technology, resources that can be provided by the school community? Are there different ways, as Sara noted, to have nodes in the community? And so, I think being responsive to the school not being privileged, the school building, the school walls, and the schedules of educators, is something that I



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heard in the, the last two shares that I wanted to, to lift up for the kickoff of this conversation as we wrap up our thoughts, and to, and to close. So, I'll open it back up.

Dr. Hamlin:

Alright, so Tiffany, do we have time to take up maybe one, one more question, or a couple more questions here?

Dr. Kyser:

Absolutely, I think we've got enough time, two or three minutes before AQ and I will wrap it up quickly. So, I think we have time for a couple more shares. Absolutely.

Sara Fitch:

I just wanted to say, speaking of going to people's homes virtually, we have quarterly family meetings that we invite all of our families to. We'll will have our first one in September, and we do two meetings in a day. The first one we do in person, and we invite them to our school building. And we give them some snacks and some drinks and we build community and we do that in person. We go over what's happening at our school. They ask questions. We have usually anywhere between 30 to 50 family members at each of those meetings. But we know not everybody's comfortable with that. We know that doesn't work with everybody's schedule. And so later on in the day at 4 PM, we'll also offer the same meeting virtually where we do it on Zoom. And it's just been incredible to see how well our parents have responded to that.

Sara Fitch:

And I would say between the two meetings we usually have somewhere between 40 to 75 family members in attendance. And they have asked us such great questions and they've helped us to



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really understand where we're headed and where we're going as far as what we're going to do with family engagement. They've really given us a lot of input to it. But it also, again, helps them to feel connected. Helps them to feel like they belong. And if they can't actually physically step in this building, we offer them the opportunity to belong with us virtually too.

Dr. Hamlin:

Yeah. You know, there's something that's kind of on my mind, is a lot of leaders that I talked to say, you know, a lot of the interactions that I will have with families during the day are prompted by, you know, negative events. And they even say, I'm really nervous when I meet families because I have to talk about difficult situations that have occurred in school. So, I'm wondering how do you, what are your philosophies or guiding, you know, what are some of your guiding frameworks to engage families when maybe the engagement is prompted by some kind of negative event that's occurred at school? How do you kind of flip things to make it not maybe such a negative interaction? Yeah, Carla.

Carla Atkinson:

I think it goes back to just the continued interaction. So that you interact so much that it's not uncommon to see the school's number appear on a caller ID. I know as a principal when I would call, I would get, sometimes, people would answer the phone like, "What now? Oh gosh." And I don't...that always bothered me because I want them to be...I want to break that. You know, we need, we need to make that not the first thought that when the school calls there's something wrong. So, I think that's, that's a big shift we're gonna all



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have to focus on making. But it goes back to this...developing those relationships early on, and maintaining those relationships. Relationships, relationships, relationships.

Dr. Hamlin:

Yeah, well, it looks like we've reached the end of our hour. So, I'm gonna turn things back over to Tiffany, but I just want to thank everyone for joining, and I just want to express my gratitude for the panelists today. I really appreciate, it's the first day of school for many people here in Oklahoma. So, thank you so much. Tiffany.

Dr. Kyser:

Absolutely. I echo Dan's sentiments. All right, just quickly to wrap up. We want to provide a special thanks to Kristina Johnson-Yates, a fellow Doctoral Research Assistant who couldn't join us today but was integral in putting in some effort in the, the presentation and some pre-communication information. So, thank you. Also as a reminder, don't forget to stop by our website for an array of resources and supports related to intentionally centering parents and caregivers in equity work.

Dr. Kyser:

Lastly, join the conversation. We only had an hour today of a coffee break or a tea break. Continue the conversation. We encourage you to connect with us on Facebook or Instagram or LinkedIn. All can be found via our website www.greatlakesequity.org. We look forward to connecting with you in the future. And then finally, we are an organization of continuous improvement. We wanna know from you what went well in today's *Virtual Coffeehouse* and what are areas we can improve. We would ask for you to complete the post-session



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questionnaire. It takes about five to ten minutes. AQ is also putting that in the chat. It'll also be in a post-email summary, and we would ask if you have the time to complete that. We really, really appreciate and value your feedback.

Dr. Kyser:

In closing, I wanna send a, a big thanks to our panelists. Thank you so much. Carla, Sara, Jeremy, Mindi, I want to make sure Kulsum. Thank you all. And then a special thanks of course to our Equity Fellow, Oklahoma, Dan, Dr. Daniel Hamlin, appreciate you being here. I want to lift up a virtual cheers to each of you as we move forward in our day and I will move us to close. I want to hold space, Dan, if there's any final comments you have before we officially close.

Dr. Hamlin:

No, all set. Thank you.

Dr. Kyser:

Alright, thank you everyone. Enjoy the rest of your day. Have a great weekend and great week.

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